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S E R M O N, *4*

PREACHED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF ST. MICHAEL,

LEWES,

ON

FRIDAY, THE 23th OF FEBRUARY, 1794,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR

A GENERAL FAST AND HUMILIATION.



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S E R M O N.

THE II. BOOK OF CHRONICLES, CHAP. VII. VERSE 14.

IF MY PEOPLE WHICH ARE CALLED BY MY NAME, SHALL HUMBLE THEMSELVES AND PRAY, AND SEEK MY FACE, AND TURN FROM THEIR WICKED WAYS; THEN WILL I HEAR FROM HEAVEN, AND WILL FORGIVE THEIR SIN, AND WILL HEAL THEIR LAND.

THESE words are a reply to part of Solomon's prayer, at the consecration of the Temple, which by God's peculiar decree and command, and according to the instructions of his father David, he had built and completed.

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In this prayer, among many other requests, he maketh the following, *If thy people Israel be put to the worse before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee; and shall return, and confess thy name, and pray and make supplication before thee in this thy house, then hear thou from thy Heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest to them and to their fathers.*

This was one of Solomon's petitions, and the Almighty, knowing, and considering with what zeal and fervency he prayed, replied, in the words of the text, *If the People, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*

The text, thus elucidated, should prove to us the efficacy of prayer in seasons of public calamity and distress; and from this as well as from other instances we shall produce, it
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will plainly appear that this mode was generally adopted in all ages, and often with success.

When Benhadad, the proud Prince of Assyria, flushed with success, and intoxicated with victory, sent his insulting message to the Samaritan King, commanding submission the most abject and servile, and the key of all his treasures, saying, *thy silver and thy gold is mine ; thy wives also and thy children, even the goodliest, are mine ; and to-morrow I will send my servants, and they shall search thy house, and the houses of thy servants, and it shall be, that whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put it in their hand and take it away.*—To what had then the affrighted Ahab recourse ? To prayer, and to the Almighty. A vast army, Benhadad, and with him thirty-two Kings, who were subservient to his will, and all their chariots, and horses, lay before Samaria. Thus beset, encompassed and threatened, Ahab flew to the sanctuary of God, for refuge and redress.—Trusting in his Maker, he sent back the messengers with

this answer, *Tell him, let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast himself as him that putteth it off*, let him not triumph till the battle is over, nor exult before he is sure of conquest. Ahab's confidence was well founded: Ben-hadad's insolence and iniquity met with their desert; the Assyrians were defeated with great slaughter, and the presumptuous King not only put to flight, but forced to beg his life of the victorious Ahab; the multitude of ^{his} ~~whose~~ host could not save him, nor all his power (while he was void of piety) deliver him.

We read again in the 14th chapter of this Book, that the petition of the pious Asa so prevailed, that he put to flight Zera, at the head of treble his number of Æthiopian warriors.—The Mother of Samuel also in her beautiful Song of Thankfulness, speaketh thus, *Talk no more so exceeding proudly, let not arrogancy come out of your mouth, for the adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; he shall give strength unto his King, and*
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exalt the horn of his anointed. Thus we perceive that the arm of pride God delighteth to subdue ; and that his eyes are over the haughty of every degree, to bring them down ; but that an oppressed, a penitent, and a supplicating people, he will hear and will save ; and if we wanted more proof of this, we might turn our attention towards the successful prayer of Hezekiah, when the imperious Sennacherib was driven from the walls of Jerusalem, and the Angel of the Lord smote in one night a hundred and fourscore and five thousand of his men ; or to the capture of Babylon, and total destruction of the impious Belshazzar and his profligate court and army.

But we trust we have already shewn the propriety of prayer and supplication in all times of public danger and difficulty ; and having proved it, we ask, what more effectual mode at present can a King devise, or a people pursue, to avert the anger, or procure the favor of an offended God, than by publicly bewailing their sins, and with one voice, and one accord, suing for mercy and assistance ?

assistance?—And when, as on this day, a day of general humiliation and prayer, a christian King, and a christian People, jointly implore God's pity and protection, *seek his face*, and resolve to *turn from their wicked ways*, surely they may have reasonable hope, that he will *bear from Heaven, forgive their sins, and heal their land*.—In this hope (and I trust in this humility of mind also) it is that we are here convened,—convened, to pray for success to our fleets and armies, and that success may be the prelude to peace; and Peace is certainly an object worthy a nation's prayer: but how far it is by human means attainable, or to be attempted at this period, it is not for me at this time and in this place to discuss. The prophet Isaiah telleth us, *That the work of righteousness shall be peace*; but if we are to have no peace till we perceive the work of righteousness in those with whom we are at war, God only knows when our warfare will end; for we may well apply to them and their city, the words of the same prophet, *How is the faithful city become an Harlot! if it was full of righteousness,*

righteousness, and if judgment once lodged in it, it is now full of Murderers, and wherever we turn our eyes and our attention, we shall alike find in their skirts the blood of the souls of the poor Innocents.—If we take a retrospective view, we see the Assassin's dagger reeking with the gore of human victims.—A little while ago, it was but to cry "Havock" in the city of Paris, and the Dogs of Discord gave a loose to their savage fury, and murdered all before them: The blood of their nobles ran in their streets; there were there "*Heaps of slain*" and mangled bodies in every quarter.—The cries of the innocent, the prayers of the poor sufferers, the supplications of wives, of widows, and of orphans, were alike unheard and unheeded. Freedom was the word, Ferocity the work, and the sappling plant of Liberty, by the most licentious, the most abandoned, the most barbarous people that ever called themselves civilized, was bath'd, was steep'd, was drench'd with blood; the blood, even of dethron'd, degraded, and at last wantonly murdered Majesty; and at this moment all the poor
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remains of royalty and wretchedness, are lingering out their sad and sorrowful suspense in solitude and a prison.—Two orphan children, deprived of all they held most dear, bereaved of both their royal parents, robbed of their guardians and their guides, are daily exposed to the same cruel and untimely end :—They live but to bewail their own forlorn estate, and to anticipate evils greater and more grievous than do now surround them.—Pitiless men attend them, merciless murderers bear rule over them ; and who can tell but their blood like that of their luckless parents may very speedily be shed, to fertilize the ROOTLESS plant of French Liberty, or slake the thirst of sanguinary savages ?——Add to this, their only Relative not massacred, or exil'd, fully participates in all their miseries ; suffers the same suspense, harbours the same horrors, and forebodes the same fate ; a fate against which Innocence is no bar, Piety and Virtue no protection : Heaven only can preserve them, and the prayer of humanity and pity cannot but ascend

tend in fervent supplication for their safety. May God defend and protect them !

But let us now quit this subject of private sorrow and affliction, and turn towards a scene of more general calamity, consternation, and confusion ; a scene full freighted with every thing that can disgust or appal a christian, or a compassionate mind.—Here we shall see the once so boasted Tree of Liberty bringing forth the fruit of unexampled Tyranny : it is now propped and supported only by an instrument of death, which has of late been and indeed still is so gorg'd and glutted with human victims, and with human gore, that humanity cannot but stand aghast with abhorrence, at such scenes of tyrannic carnage and cruelty.—The blood of Englishmen must (or I am sure ought to) freeze in their veins at such sad spectacles ; for where is the man who has any right reason, who has any real Religion, who has any regard for true Liberty —BRITISH Liberty ; who has any love for his King or his Country, who does not execrate and detest such principles, and such

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proceedings? And yet the perpetrators of these crimes pretend to celebrate the Festival of Reason, but it is in their insanity: They scoff at all religion; in their hearts, and in their public assemblies, they have said *There is no God!* And by the altar they have raised to eternal Sleep, they openly deny the doctrines of Christ, and the power of his Resurrection.

Is this then the infidel Liberty that BRITONS shall aspire to? Will a christian people FRATERNIZE with Regicides and Unbelievers? God forbid!—For foul must be his heart, and little of the christian in it, who would not spurn with contempt the precepts of such Libertines, the practice of such Profligates.

Yet, it is much to be feared, there are existing among us, even among those who call themselves christians and Britons, men, whose minds are thus depraved, whose hearts are thus corrupted, and who secretly wish, if they do not secretly conspire, to stir up internal

ternal discord and confusion : Unprincipled and selfish, they look forward to a general wreck, for a share in the general plunder ; they clamour for more Liberty in the hope of more licentiousness ; they cry aloud for Freedom, only to avert the fear of punishment ; and wishing to be lawless, they decry and cavil at those laws, which from affording EQUAL protection to the person and property of the Prince and the Peasant, become to EVERY BRITISH SUBJECT security, safety, and the only reasonable and covetable EQUALITY.

Against such men, or rather such mischievous miscreants, it is our business, our bounden duty to guard ; to mark, to point at, and to expose to public detection and detestation, those, who under the mask of Reform, are plotting for Revolution ; and having themselves, little, or nothing to lose, know they have no chance of rising but from rapine, or of having profusion but from pil-lage. Such men let us utterly abhor ; but such ONLY are the men I would wish to

stigmatize and condemn:—The moderate Reformist, the man who on calm and considerate conviction, (putting party and prejudice aside) argues for amendment, and wishes but to correct and improve where correction and improvement can work a good work; such a one, far be it from me even to reprove: his wish is to do right, and so wishing, no censure can attach to him: But even in this case, zeal may possibly out-run judgment; and an ill-tim'd attempt to reform, frustrate the purpose of reformation.

In candour, we must allow, that our political Constitution, tho' pure in its spirit, and in its principle, is not without its obvious defects and imperfections; but if we consider the period of its existence, and how much error must be incident to humanity, and of course to all human institutions, we may probably have more reason to wonder at the paucity, than the multiplicity of its corruptions. However, are they many, or are they few, if they are of any malignity, there is no reason why they should not in PROPER TIME

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be quietly and temperately done away. In PROPER TIME, I must repeat, because surely this is not the PROPER TIME for such a work ; nor the period of external war, tumult, and danger, the season for internal revision and political regeneration. Were a town on fire in various places, would any of its residents attempt to repair the casual defects in their own habitations, before they lent their assistance to extinguish the flames, and to prevent a general conflagration ? Or what should we have thought of the afflicted parent, who in Scripture is represented as calling out in all the agony of grief and apprehension, *Sir, come down e'er my child die*, if he had first requested his Redeemer's attention to some trifling malady of his own, and made his child his secondary consideration.

Thus, while the state and the nation are in imminent danger from external enemies, while our united exertions as a people are called for in our general defence and protection ; while the GUILLOTINE of France threatens to stand substitute, for the old, and venerable

venerable Trunk of Liberty, under whose shadow we have so long been happy and free ; shall we unwisely set about to prune, before we take care to protect this Tree of our political Life ? Surely not ; — *Let it alone this year*, or much longer, if the storm that threatens it from without, be not overpast : And not till the danger subsides, and tranquility is restored, let us offer to meddle with its few defective branches.—There is a time for all things, and a work as well as a word should be in due season to make it effectual and salutary.—Depend upon it, we stand as much in need of a private as a public Reform ; and we may very properly now adopt the language of *St. James*, and say, *Cleanse your hands ye sinners, and purify your hearts ye double-minded* ;—for it certainly is the multitude of private vices, that so enlarges and magnifies public transgression and enormity ; and would we first correct ourselves, our ambition, our covetousness, our lust of power and gain ; would we ourselves *cease to do evil, and learn individually to do well* ; would we lay aside our own evil works
and

and wills, *and follow after righteousness and the holy commandments*, it would turn much more to our profit, than to point out the flaws in our political system, and to rail and cavil at public inaccuracies.

If the people, who are called by my name, will turn from their wicked ways, saith the Almighty, then I will forgive their sins, and heal their land. Let us, therefore, well note this **CONDITIONAL** covenant, and observe, that we must not expect Protection without Penitence.—The regicide Revolutionists of France openly make a mock at God and at Christ, and say, “That to die, is but to sleep for ever.” The People of England, on the other hand, acknowledge a God, and profess to believe, that the Day of Death is the eve of eternal Life : But here it must be asked, How many professing publicly this belief, act in direct opposition to their own creed, and in their works deny their Maker ? We start at Gallic blasphemy and infidelity ; we readily espy *the Mote that is in another’s eye, but we perceive not the Beam in our own.* We consider

sider not how many crimes pollute, how much evil pervades, or how little appearance of true Religion is to be seen among ourselves; and of the multitude who are called by Christ's name, how few there are who really walk *according to the Truth that is in Jesus.*

It was a sore complaint against the Jews, *that they drew near unto God with their Mouths, but their Hearts were far from him: Of Judah, the Almighty complains, that she turn'd not unto him with her whole Heart, but feignedly: And of Ephraim, it was said, that his goodness was as a Morning Cloud, and as the early Dew it passed away.*—

Our Saviour repeatedly warns his Disciples against Insincerity and Hypocrisy: And St. Paul accuses his Converts of *having only the form of Godliness, but denying the power thereof:* St. John, also, in his Revelations, severely rebukes the Laodiceans, for being only *like warm* in their religious exercises, and therefore exhorts them to be *zealous, and repent.*

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Let, therefore, each man's own heart now make its own scrutiny ; and try and examine, whether, or no, there is any Godliness in it : For we are assured, that, *he whose heart doth not condemn him, must have confidence in God ;* and such confidence cannot but afford comfort and consolation in both public and private calamities ; for, we are further assured, if we THEN ask any thing according to God's will, He heareth us and will grant our requests.

In this confidence, and in this hope, therefore, let us now fervently implore God's pity, pardon, and protection ; and promising to *turn from our wicked ways, let us seek his face, humble ourselves, and pray that he will be graciously pleased to hear from Heaven, forgive our sins, and heal our Land.*

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SERMON.

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AMEN